

More animals seen on *Thryptomene*

Introduction

In *The Victorian Naturalist* volume 122 (4), I gave an account of arthropods and birds observed on a *Thryptomene* shrub between September 2003 and the end of August 2004 (Hubregtse 2005). This plant has continued to be a source of interest. I have found out a little more about some of the animals I recorded in my initial study, and observed an additional 36 species using the plant. Nineteen of these were seen between 1 September and 31 December 2004. Subsequently, with the continuing dry weather, the number of arthropods seemed to decrease, and at the time of writing (10 March 2007) the shrub is under stress.

Animals seen

The animals I found included arthropods from three additional orders (Odonata, Blattodea and Neuroptera), and three more species of passerine birds.

Arthropods

Araneae

Another four types of very small spider were noted. One of these was a tiny brown flower spider with a triangular-shaped abdomen that had a small projection at each point of the 'triangle'. When alarmed, this spider tucked its legs under its body and stayed very still, looking just like one of the dead *Thryptomene* flowers – a disguise that no doubt helped it avoid being captured by marauding wasps. There were two more types of spiny-legged lynx spider (Ixyopidae): one was pale yellow, while the other had brown legs and cream and dark brown markings on its body. There was also a light orange-brown spider with a very smooth body and smooth legs.

Odonata

A medium sized dragonfly with a brown body and brown edges on its wings alighted on the shrub on 10 October 2004 but flew away as soon as I approached it.

Blattodea

A species of brown cockroach was seen in the shrub on 11 December 2004.

Mantodea

Both the brown and green mantids have been present each year, and were seen eating Honey Bees *Apis mellifera* in March 2006. During January 2006, there were also some larger, paler green mantids with short antennae and transverse yellow stripes on the underside of the abdomen. One unfortunate individual climbed on to a window frame and was squashed when a sudden gust of wind slammed the window shut.

Orthoptera

A green katydid spent some time in the shrub at the end of November 2004.

Phasmatodea

In February 2005 I found what looked like a piece of curled up dry grass hanging on one of the twigs. Close examination revealed the remains of a young stick insect bound in spiderweb. I hadn't seen a stick insect anywhere in our garden since January 2004; nor had I realised that spiders prey on them.

Hemiptera

In mid December 2004, a cotton wool-like substance appeared on a couple of the twigs, probably indicating the presence of mealy bugs. At the end of December I discovered that the wings of the grey leaf hopper (Ricaniidae), seen previously, can be creamy-coloured. I thought I had found another type, but within four hours the wings had turned grey. On 26 January 2005, a black and orange assassin bug (Reduviidae) (Fig. 1) clambered about on the twigs, searching for prey.

Neuroptera

I found a lacewing egg on 21 December 2004 and a larva, camouflaged in bits of plant debris, on 19 January 2005.

Coleoptera

Two more types of beetle, a black and yellow ladybird beetle (Coccinellidae) and a big brownish grey longicorn beetle (Cerambycidae) (Fig. 2) with orange coloration at the base of its antennae, were seen. The longicorn beetle had been injured.



Fig. 1. Assassin bug.



Fig. 2. Injured longicorn beetle

Diptera

Three additional members of this order paid a brief visit to the plant: a crane fly, larger than the species seen in 2003-4; a blowfly with a creamy-coloured end to its abdomen; and a brownish grey bee fly with three yellow stripes on its abdomen.

Lepidoptera

Nine more types of moth and three more types of butterfly were observed. Five of the moths belonged to the family Oecophoridae: *Eochrois pulverulenta*, pinkish brown in colour; two *Thema* species, looking like scraps of dead leaf; and two *Tortricopsis* species (*T. uncinella*, shaped like a buff-coloured isosceles triangle, and a *Tortricopsis* species that was

pinkish with brown markings). Also present were *Hellula hydralis* (Pyralidae) and three unidentified moths. At rest, one of these resembled a tiny, thin, yellowish bit of stick; another was slender and dull brownish grey; while the third, not observed until February 2007, was dark brown, shaped a bit like a Light Brown Apple *Epiphyas postvittana* but smaller, and was seen only after sunset.

A Cabbage White *Pieris rapae* paid a brief visit to the flowers on 17 January 2005. This was the first time I had seen this butterfly land on the shrub, although one or more usually flew past it several times per day during spring, summer and autumn. On 2 February 2005, 142 mm of rain fell, followed by a further 7 mm the next day. On 4 February, a Cabbage White spent quite some time visiting the flowers, perhaps because they produced more nectar after the rain. On March 2005, a small dark brown butterfly with three creamy white spots on each forewing landed on a twig. A Caper White *Belenois java* did likewise on 18 October 2006. There were no flowers by this time because, for the first time ever, flowering finished at the beginning, rather than the end, of October.

Hymenoptera

There were another six species in this order: a Braconid wasp (Braconidae) with a black head and abdomen and brown thorax; a slender black wasp (Vespidae) with four yellow stripes on its abdomen; a small black wasp (Sphecidae) dragging a paralysed orange-brown spider – the smooth-bodied one – along a twig; a very tiny bee, rather like a miniature Honey Bee; a small bee with several narrow stripes on its abdomen; and a Bluebanded Bee (Anthophoridae) (Fig. 3), not seen before January 2007.

Arthropods in cocoons

The contents of most cocoons present in



Fig. 3. Bluebanded Bee on Lemon Balm.

2004-5 were eaten (see below). I once saw a caterpillar poke its head out of a cocoon, so I think some of these structures were being used as shelters. I suspected as much when, in my original study, I found caterpillar frass in one of the cocoons.

Birds

Passeriformes

By the end of November 2004 Little Wattlebirds *Anthochaera chrysoptera* had taken over the territory from the Red Wattlebirds *A. carunculata*, though the latter were still seen from time to time. From 28 December 2004 to 15 January 2005, and again on 15 February 2005, a Little Wattlebird devoured the contents of cocoons on the shrub. It also fed from the flowers and pecked at something on the twigs. Two New Holland Honeyeaters *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae* fed briefly from the flowers on 12 February 2006. Interestingly, these birds were using the plant principally for concealment as they quietly approached the adjacent *Grevillea* 'Robyn Gordon', remaining undetected by

the wattlebirds for just long enough to consume some nectar before being discovered and chased away (Hubregtse 2006). On 9 January 2007 a male Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* perched on a branch and looked around for anything edible.

Conclusion

Having now seen about 130 types of animals from 15 different Orders, I continue to be amazed at this plant's ability to attract such a wide variety of creatures. Regrettably, the dry weather is taking its toll

and the shrub has been under stress for some time. Although there are many flower buds, most are drying up and going brown before they open, so they are not attracting insects. There are now few spiders, hardly any wasps, and I have seen only two praying mantids this year. I supply water at legal intervals in hope of saving this shrub, which has been such a source of pleasure and fascination during the past 12 years.

Acknowledgements

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References

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